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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: DARFUR TALKS IN ABUJA AUGUST 23

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11. (SBU) The Darfur peace talks began in Abuja August 23 with an open plenary session chaired by President Obasanjo. Obasanjo called on the Sudanese parties to reach a settlement at the negotiations of the underlying political issues, not only deal with humanitarian and security issues, and approach the talks with open minds and no preconditions. Obasanjo also underscored that the negotiations should be lead by the Sudanese parties, and that they needed to build confidence. He noted his desire to avoid any foreign (read Western) intervention, and to have a sizable AU protection force augment Sudanese security forces. He welcomed foreign assistance and thanked the U.S., UK, EU and others for their assistance to date, but emphasized that the process must be African.

12. (SBU) Obasanjo's speech matched a conversation he had with the Ambassador and a visiting code/Eucom delegation (septel) on different issues earlier in the morning August 23. Obasanjo's bottom line on Darfur and other issues were that Africans needed to solve them, and foreign intervention was neither useful nor welcome in any but a technical assistance role. The Darfur talks continued in that mode, as the other two sessions August 23 following the plenary to discuss the talks' agenda were closed to observers.

13. (SBU) In other speeches at the plenary, AU chairperson Konare and others emphasized security and humanitarian considerations more than Obasanjo did. Obasanjo's view won out in the draft agenda, which was presented to the Sudanese delegations in the first closed session. The Sudanese parties did not speak in the plenary, and gave their opening remarks at the first closed session. At the second closed session, which began at 8pm, the Sudanese parties asked for time to caucus (and rest). The next session -- also closed to the observers -- was agreed for 11am the next day, August 24.

14. (SBU) Both rebel movements complained during the closed sessions that the observers had been present in all previous sessions at Ndjamena and Addis Ababa, and asked that they be included at all sessions in these talks. At one point, Obasanjo reportedly asked them why they did not have more trust in Obasanjo and the AU. Obasanjo went on to present a draft agenda based on the Sudanese parties' statements and other expressions at the Addis Ababa talks. The agenda was not agreed August 23, and the August 24 session will have setting the agenda as its top priority.

15. (SBU) The draft agenda has four parts.

I. Humanitarian Issues

- Presentation of humanitarian issues report by the UN.
- Presentation of humanitarian issues reports by the Sudanese parties.
- Modalities for improving the humanitarian situation.

II. Security Issues

- Implementation of the Ndjamena ceasefire.
- Disarmament of the janjaweed and other militias.
- Cantonment of the (rebel) movements.
- Release of prisoners.
- Strengthening of the AU peace support mission in Darfur.

III. Political Questions

- Governance.
- Discussion.

IV. Economic and Social Affairs

- Presentation by the parties of their respective positions.
- Discussion.

16. (SBU) The AU mediation team is also proposing to the Sudanese parties that the negotiations be organized into four committees working the four agenda items, although the AU team told the observers in a briefing August 24 that there may not be enough interpreters and other support to run the four committees simultaneously. The AU team at that observers briefing also took mentioned that they wanted to

keep the observers on hand and would need their help. In response to a British question, they mentioned a dynamic by which observers might be brought more into the process after the agenda is adopted, although this still had to be agreed by the mediators and the Sudanese parties.

17. (SBU) We, in cooperation with the UK, EU and other Europeans are leaning on the AU to get at least some of the "observers" back into the negotiating room. The rebels are pressing either harder. That said, in the August 23-24 sessions, Obasanjo personally took a strong position that will be hard to push back. AU officials have counseled patience, holding out the promise that this is an evolving situation and that we will be much more directly involved as the formats are worked out. We laid down markers, and reserve judgment.

18. (SBU) The rebel movements have told us they are not happy with dividing into committees, nor not having the observers always in the negotiating room, but they plan to engage seriously in the talks.

19. (U) Minimize considered.
CAMPBELL